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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: "THIS MEANS WAR": EGYPTIAN MEDIA COVERAGE OF SHARM EL SHEIKH TERRORIST ATTACKS

1. Summary: Egyptian TV covered the July 23 Sharm El Sheikh bombings extensively throughout the day. TV images immediately after the attacks showed emergency workers removing bodies from the bomb sites and assisting the injured, while government officials and intellectuals gave phone interviews condemning the terrorist bombings. The print press gave banner headline coverage and lead with graphic images of the destruction on July 23 and 24. Commentary on TV and in print ranged from criticism of Al-Qaeda, to the Egyptian government, to U.S. foreign policy in Iraq and the region as being the cause of terrorism. Notably, many commentators used the word "war" to characterize the attacks in Sharm. USG statements condemning the attacks and offering condolences to the victims received wide coverage. End summary.

2. Print coverage: The day of the July 23 Sharm terrorist attacks, the pro-government press gave banner headline coverage to terrorist attacks in Sharm El Sheikh with images of the destruction. "A String of Terrorist Explosions Shake Sharm El Sheikh" read the headline of leading daily Al-Ahram (circulation: 750,000). Akhbar Al-Youm (circulation: 1,000,000) reported "Terrorist Explosions Shake Sharm El Sheikh." English-language daily Egyptian Gazette (read largely by tourists and visitors to Egypt) lead with the headline "Mubarak vows to pursue 'Battle on terror.'" Pro-government Al Gomhuriya's (circulation 200,000) Editor-in-chief commented on the terrorist bombings, writing "this means war." The day after, on July 24, the independent and opposition press gave banner coverage to the attacks. "Mubarak: We Won't Surrender to the Scourge of Terrorism and We Won't Neglect Egypt's Security" read the headline of independent Nahdet Masr (circulation: 20,000). Opposition Al-Wafd (circulation: 50,000) led with the headline "83 Killed and 199 Injured in Sharm El Sheikh Explosions"; while independent Al-Masry Al-Youm (circulation: 50,000) reported "Al-Qaeda Officially Targets Egypt; 'Saturday Massacre' Threatens the Fairy Tale of Sharm El Sheikh."

3. TV coverage: Egyptian TV covered the attacks extensively on July 23. TV images immediately after the attacks showed emergency relief workers at work moving body bags and attending to victims. President Mubarak's condemnation of the attacks was broadcast live on Egyptian TV on July 23. "The ugly face of terror has reappeared," Mubarak said. "It is a blind terror sweeping the world around us, intimidating innocents and targeting them wherever they are. Now it has reached Sharm El Sheikh, the symbol of peace. This criminal, cowardly act is aimed at shaking Egypt's security and stability and at harming its sons and its guests."

4. Print commentary: "While we reject the attacks, there will always be a link between the terrorist bombings in Madrid, London, and Sharm with the Anglo-American occupation of Iraq and Israeli aggression," wrote the Editor-in-chief of Al-Wafd, Abbas Al-Tarabilly, on July 24. A columnist in Al-Ahram on July 24 hinted that the Sharm attacks might be "retaliation" for the way the Egyptian government investigated the October 2004 Taba bombings. The same day, Al-Ahram's Editor-in-Chief, Osama Saraya, made note of the date of the Sharm attacks, Egypt's National Day, warning the government and the public to stay alert during future holidays. And a well-known Al-Ahram commentator sharply criticized those who "enjoy killing innocent people."

5. TV commentary: Throughout July 23, TV hosted government officials, intellectuals, and journalists who offered commentary and condemnation. Commentary ranged from criticism of Al-Qaeda and its killing of innocents, to poverty and corruption as the cause of terrorism (a veiled critique of the Egyptian government), to U.S. foreign policy in Iraq and the region. Many commentators used the word "war" to characterize the attacks in Sharm. Several commentators remarked that Sharm El Sheikh was seen by extremists as a target, as the city had hosted anti-terrorism conferences and President Mubarak spends large amounts of time there. Adel Hamuda, Editor-in-chief of weekly independent newspaper Al-Fajr (circulation: 50,000) claimed on Egyptian TV on July 23 that a "powerful group"

was behind the attacks, given the costs it would take to carry them out. Dr. Refaat Al-Said, Chairman of the Tagamou party, also spoke on Egyptian TV, claiming that Egypt's "real crisis" is the "status quo" and called on Arab nations to fight terrorism together. A businessman on the popular Channel 1 program Malaaff Khass ("Special File") called on other businessmen to "speed up their projects" in Egypt to relay the message that "terrorism will not succeed." On Channel 2's Al-Bayt Baytak ("Make Yourself at Home"), Muhammad Salah, Editor-in-chief of the Saudi-owned daily Al-Hayat, claimed that "sound religious education" was needed to prevent extremists groups from exploiting and misleading people into committing terrorist attacks. A journalist appearing on Dream TV's program "10 p.m." stated, "Let's admit to ourselves that there are sleeping terrorist cells in Egypt that are armed and well financed"; while Al-Nabawi Ismail, a former Minister of Interior, hinted that Israel might have something to do with the financing and organizing of the attack.

16. USG statements covered: Egyptian TV placed the White House's July 23 condemnation of the bombing and condolences to the victims as the top news story following reports on President Mubarak's speech to the nation. Secretary Rice's statement of condemnation of the terrorist bombings during her meeting with Palestinian PM Ahmed Qurei' was covered by Egyptian TV and news services. On July 24, the Egyptian press pro-government, opposition, and independent highlighted White House and Secretary Rice's statements of support on its front pages and international news sections. Post's condemnation of the bombings and its warden message, published on its public website, was covered on July 24 by several independent newspapers, receiving front page coverage in independent daily Nahdet Masr.

JONES